

Message Text

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ACTION AF-07

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 EA-06 ISO-00 MC-01 AID-05 PRS-01 PM-03

NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 RSC-01 CIAE-00 INR-05 NSAE-00

DODE-00 INRE-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 SAJ-01 SAM-01 /066 W

----- 030246

O 291658Z NOV 74

FM AMEMBASSY KINSHASA

TO SECSTATE NIACT IMMEDIATE 297

AMEMBASSY SEOUL NIACTIMMEDIATE

INFO AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

USLO PEKING

C O N F I D E N T I A L KINSHASA 10099

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, CG, KN KS CH

SUBJECT: MOBUTU TO NORTH KOREA IN SEARCH OF ARMS?

1. MOBUTU'S DECISION TO PAY OFFICIAL VISIT TO NORTH KOREA IN SECOND WEEK DEC AND PRESUMABLY CHINA INFORMALLY, IS DIRECT OUTGROWTH SOVIET REQUEST THAT HE POSTPONE SCHEDULED DEC 9 VISIT TO MOSCOW. MOBUTU, I WOULD SURMISE, IS FURIOUS AT SOVIET "INSULT" AND QUICKLY MOVED TO PICK UP NORTH KOREAN OPTION WHICH MONTH AGO HE HAD TOLD EASUM AND ME HE HAD RULED OUT FOR TIME BEING. WHILE WE HAVE ONE RUMOR HE MAY STILL GO TO MOSCOW IN NEAR FUTURE, I THINK THAT HIGHLY UNLIKELY. RATHER, IT SEEMS CLEAR HE WILL CONCLUDE MAJOR ARMS DEAL WITH NORTH KOREANS AND PROBABLY SEEK INCREASED CHINESE SUPPORT AS WELL. WE HAVE ALREADY SEEN THE EFFECT OF THIS ON OUR SHORT TERM INTERESTS IN THE HANDLING OF KHMER ISSUE IN UNGA AND WE LIKELY TO SEE SWITCH ON KOREA AS WELL. MOBUTU'S PAST ASSURANCES OF NEUTRALITY AND OF WILLINGNESS VISIT SEOUL BEFORE GOING TO PYONGYANG PROBABLY WERE SWEEPED ASIDE IN REACTION TO MOSCOW REBUFF. EFFECT UPON OUR LONG TERM INTERESTS IS HARDER TO JUDGE. WHILE ONE IS TEMPTED TO SAY ZAIRIAN ARMED FORCES AND NORTH KOREANS DESERVE EACH OTHER, THAT EVENTUALLY FORESEEABLE

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DIFFICULTIES OF RELATION MAY LEAD TO ESTRANGEMENT RATHER

THAN STRENGTHENED POSITION FOR FAR EASTERN VARIETIES OF COMMUNISM IN ZAIRE, IT IS NEVERTHELESS, EVEN WITH MORE DANGEROUS SOVIETS IN DOGHOUSE, FAR FROM UNALLOYED BLESSING.

2. OUR OFFER OF SPECIAL MILITARY STUDY MISSION HAS BEEN CONVEYED TO TOP LEVELS GOZ AND WE ARE TOLD IT IS APPRECIATED, BUT MISSION AND OFFER OF ARMS ON COMMERCIAL TERMS IS NO MATCH FOR LONG TERM INTEREST-FREE MILITARY EQUIPMENT LOAN COMPLETE WITH TRAINING TEAM. SOUTH KOREANS SEEM TO BE UNABLE TO RESPOND EFFECTIVELY (SEE KINSHASA 9645). TIME IS SHORT AND INDEED IT MAY BE TOO LATE TO DO ANYTHING EFFECTIVE BUT MORE I PONDER SITUATION, MORE I AM INCLINED TO THINK SOUTH KOREANS SHOULD SNAP OUT OF IT, COME FORWARD BOTH WITH FORMAL INVITATION TO VISIT SEOUL BEFORE OR AFTER PYONGYANG AND IF THEY OR WE WANT TO TRY TO HOLD POSITION HERE AND PERHAPS MORE WIDELY IN AFRICA, SEOUL SHOULD COUPLE INVITATION WITH EXPRESSION OF WILLINGNESS TO EXPLORE SERIOUSLY THEIR OWN MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM HERE. MOBUTU MAY BE LOCKED IN ON NORTH KOREAN GAMBIT BUT UNLESS ANOTHER OPTION IS AT LEAST WAVED UNDER HIS NOSE, WE HAVE NO WAY OF TESTING HIM. WE KNOW THERE IS SOME OPPOSITION WITHIN ZAIRE ESTABLISHMENT TO NORTH KOREAN MOVE. THUS, RAPID WELL-BAITED OFFER FROM SEOUL COULD EVOKE INTEREST.

3. TO CONCLUDE, LET ME SAY THAT WHILE WE HAVE NO SUPPORTING EVIDENCE, I WOULD GUESS THAT SOVIET ACTION WAS TRIGGERED BY INDICATIONS THAT MOBUTU CONDITIONED HIS WILLINGNESS TO ACCEPT MILITARY ASSISTANCE FROM MOSCOW AND CIVIL AVIATION AGREEMENT OPENING KINSHASA TO AEROFLOT ON SOVIET WILLINGNESS TO DROP NETO AS THEIR MAN TO RUN ANGOLA. WHILE THIS IS HIGHLY SPECULATIVE, THERE IS NOT SLIGHTEST DOUBT IN MY MIND BUT THAT ANGOLA IS ABSOLUTELY CENTRAL TO MOBUTU'S CALCULATIONS AND MANEUVERS. JUST AS HE BROUGHT PRC IN TO SUPPLY AND TRAIN FNLA FORCES, HE IS NOW SEEKING HEDGE HIS FAIRLY STRONG NEGOTIATING POSITION BY IMPROVING STATUS OF ZAIRIAN ARMED FORCES EVEN AT PRICE OF DEAL WITH NORTH KOREAN COMMUNITISTS.

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4. AS INDICATED ABOVE, UNLESS AS I JUDGE HIGHLY UNLIKELY, US CAN DO MORE, COMPETITIVE OPTION COULD ONLY BE PUT TOGETHER IN SEOUL.
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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: ARMS, FOREIGN RELATIONS, MILITARY ASSISTANCE, CHIEF OF STATE VISITS, POLITICAL SITUATION
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 29 NOV 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: MorefiRH
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974KINSHA10099
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: GS
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740346-0922
From: KINSHASA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t1974114/aaaaacni.tel
Line Count: 111
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 3
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: CONFIDENTIAL
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: MorefiRH
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 12 JUN 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <12 JUN 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <26 DEC 2002 by MorefiRH>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MOBUTU TO NORTH KOREA IN SEARCH OF ARMS?
TAGS: PFOR, CG, KN, KS, CH, UR, (MOBUTU, SESE SEKO)
To: STATE SEOUL
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005